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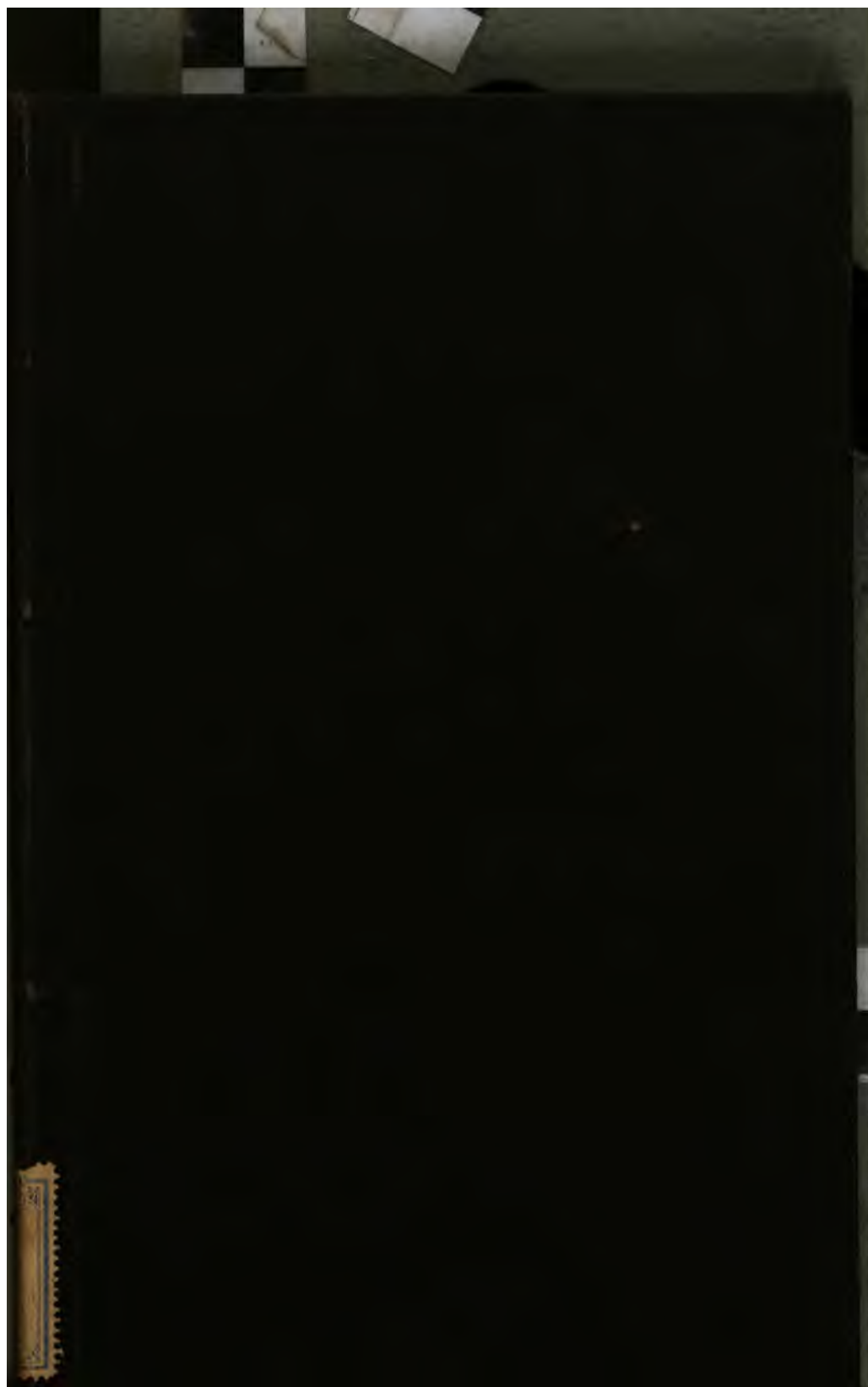
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44.

A SKETCH of the One Great ARGUMENT,

Formed from the
Several Concurring EVIDENCES,
FOR THE
TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

By the Rev. JOHN ROTHERAM, M. A.
of Codrington College in Barbados.

Σειρήν ληυστην ἐξ ἡρανοθεν κρημασσοτες.

Hem. II. L. 8.



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To
His EXCELLENCY,
The Honourable
HENRY GRENVILLE Esqr.
Governor of *Barbados*,

The following Papers are,
From a grateful Sense of many personal
Favours received by the Author, many
signal Advantages enjoy'd by this whole
Island, under His prudent, vigilant, and
impartial Administration,

Humbly inscribed,

By

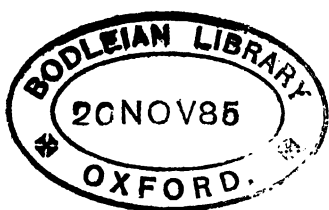
His EXCELLENCY'S

most Obedient

and most obedient Servant,

Codrington Coll. Barbados,
June 24. 1753.

JOHN ROTHERAM.



T H E
P R E F A C E.

THE following tract is indeed what the title page speaks it, no more than a sketch or outline of the evidence for our religion. But then it is an outline taken at full length, and such an one as I hope may impress a lively idea of that characteristic excellency which distinguishes it from, and raises it above, all others.

Every distinct topic of argument in favour of revelation has been so fully and advantageously handled, and every essential part of it that could be called in question so ably defended, that nothing of that kind seems capable of being added. And yet do we not see our religion openly treated with all that neglect, scorn, and malevolence, as if it was a design of the weakest structure, the most indifferent consequence, nay the most hurtful tendency? A sight equally shocking and deplorable! A continuation

tion of that ^a scene, where the divinest benevolence and the most spotless purity that ever appeared on earth, received all the contumelious usage due to the greatest inhumanity and the most pestilent wickedness.

I have endeavoured to convince those who can be capable of such indecency, that though they may have found objections of seeming force against some small circumstance of revelation, yet they have no right to put on an air of triumph and insolence as if they had gained a compleat victory over Christianity; because they can be no judges of the force of such particular objections till they have attentively considered the whole body of revelation together.

I cannot better inforce my sentiments on this subject than in the following fine observations of Lord Bacon. ^b “*Etenim symmetria scientiæ, singulis sci-*
“*licet partibus se invicem sustentibus, est, & esse*
“*debet, vera atque expedita ratio refellendi objec-*
“*tiones minorum gentium: contra, si singula axio-*
“*mata, tanquam baculos fascio seorsum extrahas, fa-*
“*cile erit ea infirmare, & pro libito, aut flectere*
“*aut frangere. — Num non in aula spatiosa con-*
“*sultius foret, unum accendere cereum, aut lychnu-*
“*chum suspendere variis luminibus instructum, quo*
“*omnia simul perlustrantur, quam in singulos angu-*
“*los quaquaversus exiguam circumferre lucernam?*”

^a Then did they spit in his face, and buffet him, and others smote him. Mat. 26. 67. ^b De Aug. Scien. L. I.

Atqui

[III]

*Atqui non abfimilis eft eorum ratio, qui non tam
 "veritatem perfpicuis argumentis, authoritatibus,
 "comparationibus, exemplis illustrare nituntur,
 "quam in hoc folum incumbunt, ut minutos quosque
 "fcrupulos eximant, & captiunculas expediant, &
 "dubitationes folvant; hoc pacto quæftionem ex
 "quæftione gignentem; quemadmodum fit in fuperio-
 "ri fimilitudine, ut lucerna in unum aliquem locum
 "delata, alios circumquaque deftituat & obfcuret."*

*"For the harmony of a fcience, each part fuppor-
 "ting the other, is and ought to be the true and brief
 "way of confutation and fuppreffion of all the fmall
 "fort of objections. But on the other fide, if you
 "take out every axiom, as the fticks of the fagot one
 "by one, you may quarrel with them, and bend
 "them, and break them at your pleafure. — Were
 "it not better for a man in a fpacious room to fet up
 "one great light, or branching candleftick of lights,
 "than to go about with a fmall watch-candle into
 "every corner? And fuch is their method that refts
 "not fo much upon evidence of truth proved by ar-
 "guments, authorities, fimilitudes, examples, as
 "upon particular confutations and folutions of every
 "fcruple, cavillation, and objection; breeding for
 "the moft part one queftion, as faft as it folveeth a-
 "nother; even as in the former refemblance, when
 "you carry the light into one corner, you darken*

a Of the advancement of Learning B. I.

"the rest." The noble Writer speaks indeed of science in general. But nothing can be more applicable to those minute reasoners, on this of revelation as well as on every other subject, whose eyes are never raised above some of its smallest parts, who are too near-sighted to comprehend a system. They know very well that the philosophers would treat them with contempt, if they should pretend to ridicule or talk decisively of the Newtonian system, without having qualified themselves to discourse of any thing greater in the creation than some diminutive country where they were born. A like behaviour, in a matter of this importance, does not excite contempt but pity. We desire to overcome, without exposing, their weakness. To this end I heartily join in the following wish of a late pious Bishop of our Church, and have endeavoured as far as I am able to assist in making it take effect. "It were likewise to be wished, that the professed enemies of Revealed Religion, would take some such way as this, of considering it all at once, in the full extent and simplicity of it, before they conclude any part of it to be either false or absurd." I have the satisfaction also to find my sentiments on this subject corresponding with those of another late eminent Bishop in his Analogy of Religion to the Constitution of Nature. And I wish this treatise might

a Preface to Bp. Gastrell's Christian Institutes.

have

have the advantage of being perused together with that, at least with the Chapter, of the particular evidence for Christianity; and might be enabled to plead in its own defence the merit of gaining a reader to a much nobler performance. I am conscious how much it would sink in his esteem by the comparison: But the argument, which is all I aim at, would be greatly strengthened; and if by this means a victory over doubts or difficulties should be obtained, I shall be no way solicitous about any share in the honour of it.

But I will not seek to recommend the intention of these sheets by any further authorities. I only wish the execution may be thought as little to need an apology as the design.



A
S K E T C H &c.

S E C T I O N I.

*Denique fit quidvis simplex duntaxat &
unum.* Hor.

“**T**HE Author of Nature doth Nothing in vain. He never employeth more Causes for the Production of any Effect where fewer are sufficient.”

This Maxim hath long been verified in Philosophy; and a just attention to it hath led the way to some of the finest discoveries. May we not believe that it is equally true in religious as in natural Philosophy, and that the God of order hath had an uniform regard to it throughout all his dispensations, since it is manifest in part of them? that it equally takes place whether Motion

tion or Conviction is to be produced ; whether it is proposed to actuate Matter, or to influence Mind ? and consequently that it will be a Guide equally faithful in researches of both kinds ? In tracing the Laws of the Universe, that Hypothesis has justly been esteemed the most beautiful, and, as far as our limited enquiries can compare them, appears to be the most consistent with Truth, where the motions laid down are the simplest, and the powers least complex. Shall we say then that the Intellectual World is put upon a different establishment, and that here only, where all the beauties of harmony would appear greatly heightened, just and frugal Oeconomy hath been made to give way to undisciplined profusion, and ill-proportioned superfluity ? If a Planet is to be held in its Orbit, the agency of different powers has not been employed where one was sufficient ; nor have two Suns been lighted up to illuminate a Globe, where one could communicate the requisite quantity of Rays. Is it not then as good reasoning to conclude, that no superfluous motives are employed to retain the world in obedience, and that no needless expence of evidence hath been made to bring us to the knowledge of Truth ? This seems indeed to be no more than what our Saviour himself instructs us in, when, at one time,

• He

* He witholds his mighty works because of unbelief; and when again in a Parable, ^b He represents Abraham as refusing to give a needless enforcement to the authority of Moses and the Prophets by sending an apparition from the dead.

These Considerations have * ever made me backward in assenting to their opinion, who seem to think that any one Miracle, or any one Prophecy, was designed of itself for a full and adequate proof of the truth of Christianity. For if every one of these is to be received as a distinct and complete proof, setting aside all relation to and coherence with others, how are the principles we speak of preserved amidst such a multiplicity of proofs; and what becomes of our admired order and oeconomy where, while one evidence was sufficient to produce the conviction proposed, a thousand evidences are promiscuously set up? One would rather be induced by the applauded beauty of simplicity and uniformity to think, that all these prophecies and all these miracles being linked together by a necessary connection, and disposed amongst each other in an

^a Mat. 13. 58. . ^b Luke 16. * See the Idea of the Subject here handled, proposed in the concluding page of a treatise upon *the Argument for the truth of Christianity drawn from a collective view of Prophecy.*

admirable symmetry and regular subordination, do constitute one complete and adequate proof of the truth of Christianity, alone able to obviate all the prejudices, and to overcome all the incredulity to which mankind are liable, if their growth and inveteracy have not made them at last too stubborn to yield to conviction.

This is the supreme proof, applicable to all cases, and whose energy is equal to all the difficulties which can arise. But then there are degrees of doubt which will give way to smaller force of conviction. These are infinitely varied, as the circumstances of complexion, capacity, opportunities, inclination, prejudice, enter differently into them; and to these the several parts of the great proof may be in their turns, as inferior proofs, successfully applied.

They therefore are not to be blamed who turn themselves to the study and management of arguments drawn from single miracles or prophecies; but such only as confine themselves to these, and would have them in all cases esteemed complete, adequate, and sovereign proofs. The strength they contain cannot be clearly apprehended by every one. To do them justice they must often be examined microscopically. Their beauties may be perfect, yet they are in miniature; and therefore may easily escape the observation
of

of the inattentive, and the penetration of the dull. 'Tis painful to keep the eye fixed upon minute objects for so long a time as is requisite to gain a perfect idea of them ; because its vessels must be here strained and contracted. But it can dwell with ease and satisfaction on the beauties of larger objects which fill its capacity, and leave it in its natural state. A blade of grass, a seed, or an animalcule, are endless scenes of wonder and instruction to those who have leisure and abilities for such studies. While they trace out the leaves and branches of a tree in the minute foldings of the seed ; admire the curious texture of the leaf ; number up the thousands of vessels in the animalcule, branching out into endless divisions ; and pursue the course of the fluids through these scarce perceptible tubes ; they can discern astonishing marks of infinite wisdom. But then these are beauties which the bulk of mankind can never have any apprehension of, nor relish for. If you would impress upon such a sense of the supreme wisdom and power, you must bid them extend their view as far as they can reach over the creation ; you must bid them survey the heavens, the earth, and the ocean ; and the bolder beauties which these contain will arrest the attention of the most incurious as well as of the most inquisitive.

The

The Consideration of our own *'fearful and wonderful Make* might easily excite one of the royal Psalmist's genius and contemplation to rise up with gratitude and thank the Lord : but even a common beholder may be led from observing the greater works of the creation to admire the wisdom of God, and to join with him when he sings, " ^b O Lord, how manifold are thy "works ; in wisdom hast Thou made them all !" The smallest parts of Revelation have undoubtedly their beauties, and their force of evidence : But do we look for these finished and complete ? for beauties which must be admired ? for evidence which is irresistible ? They are only to be found in the noble proportions, the firm structure of that comprehensive and perfect proof, of which we are speaking.

a Pf. 139. 13. b Pf. 104. 24.

SECTION II.

Dignus vindice nodus. Hor.

BUT let us advance nearer and try to gain a fuller understanding of the nature and constitution of this proof.

The Design of the christian religion is to bring back mankind into the way to heaven, which they had departed from, and were of themselves utterly unable to recover. The reason of this inability may appear thus.

Man never had a natural right to happiness. His title to it at first was not absolute and inherent, but conditional. The Conditions were, that he should always preserve himself an obedient and sinless creature. In this he failed, and therefore his title to happiness was as much extinct as if it had never been; since no conditional right can subsist longer than the conditions are maintained. But what was still worse, his situation was such, that he was never to return into an absolute insensibility and indifference, so as to remain suspended, as it were, in a middle state between happiness and misery. At the same time therefore that he fell under the forfeiture

feiture of happiness, he incurred the penalty of misery. From this dreadful situation he could never recover himself by his own power. From an innocent creature he could make himself a guilty one, but when become guilty he could not make himself innocent. He could easily stain the purity of his nature, but could not wash out that stain. His guilt indeed might be forgiven; it could not be taken away. — But then forgiveness was not the part of the offender, it could proceed from none but the offended — Here it pleased the eternal Son of God to relieve us, and to take upon himself the office of a Mediator between God and man. He offered himself a sacrifice to satisfy the demands of justice against us, and thus restored us, though not to innocence, yet to the privileges of it, freeing us from the punishment of guilt, and putting us again in possession of a right to happiness. But this right also was, like the former, conditional. He gave us a Rule of Duty, the observance of which was to secure us the favour of God, and the eternal possession of those blessings which he had again made accessible to us.

Such is the end of Christianity, “to renew man’s title to happiness.” An end which surely must be contemplated with joy and thankfulness by those who are to enjoy the benefits of it.

—— “But

—— “But are there no doubts to damp our
 “kindling joy and check our rising transports?
 “are we sure that this is not all a pleasing delu-
 “sion, called up by some art of man, to lull us
 “into a deceitful calm, and false security? Who
 “can appease the tortures which such suspicions
 “give, and assure us that this representation is in
 “reality conformable to the will of God; that
 “He will indeed accept the atonement made for
 “us, and, esteeming this a compensation for our
 “imperfect obedience, confer upon us these great
 “rewards? Where is the Evidence for the truth
 “of Christianity? If this be as convincing as the
 “end is desirable, we will then perform the
 “conditions prescribed us with a becoming fer-
 “vor and alacrity.”

For our satisfaction here, we have the history
 of this whole transaction preserved to us. In
 the Holy Scriptures we behold the plan of our
 Redemption laid out from the revelation of the
 design to its completion. We can trace it here
 with wonder and delight from its first appear-
 ance, through all the stages of its progress to its
 perfection: And we find in every period so many
 characters of Divinity; we see it introduced and
 carried on under a guard of so many wonders;
 and attended by a series of prophecies and mi-
 racles, disposed with such propriety of order,
 and

and maintaining through the widest interruptions of time and place, such an Unity of design; as fully demonstrate it to have been planned by eternal wisdom, and executed by omnipotence.

But this being a Matter important enough to deserve a more distinct illustration, we will endeavour to trace out the lines of that connection, by which the different parts of this proof grow together into a Body of such admirable beauty and strength.

SECTION III.

Παντα αλληλοις επιπλεκα⁹), και η συνδεσις ιερη.

Anton. Pius.

A *Learned Prelate*^a has already proved that a chain of prophecies does actually subsist, and that they cannot be disunited without loss of evidence. He has demonstrated further that the prophecies were given to serve a double purpose, to *support the religion of the old world*, and to *give evidence to our Saviour's mission*. We need not now re-attempt what he has performed with such advantage, and shall therefore assume it as a truth already proved. A late Author^b of distinguished merit has also pointed out a chain of miracles. We shall add, that these miracles were likewise so disposed as to concur with prophecy in support of both those designs.

The first miracle which succeeded the necessity of a Redemption was exhibited at the time of passing sentence on the offenders in Pa-

^a Bp Sherlock in his Discourses on *the Use and Intent of Prophecy*. ^b See this Argument ingeniously handled in the *Essays on the Characters*. Essay 3.

radise. It was that deviation which was made from the then established order of the creation in changing the form of the Serpent. *And the Lord God said unto the Serpent, because Thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field: upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.* To understand the propriety of this miracle we must consider its design.

It pleased God, ever kind and merciful to his creatures, when he sentenced the unhappy fallen pair, and laid before them an enumeration of those miseries in which they had involved themselves, at the same time to throw some comfortable rays of light upon the melancholy prospect; by assuring them that they were not yet deserted by his goodness, nay that he had already provided a remedy for their miseries. He foretold them that there should arise from the seed of the woman a champion in their cause, who should in his turn triumph over their now successful adversary, and in consequence reverse all the sad effects of that fatal conquest. It must be thought a great means of heightning that comfort which this promise would impart, if man might have at the same time some kind of visible security for its completion. Such security it was to behold the humiliation of the enemy already take place,
and

and the virtue of the prophecy even then beginning to operate as soon as it was communicated. The serpent was the only visible agent in the seduction of our parents. They could not therefore possibly behold it without having that agonizing scene full in their view, and without undergoing all those tremors and bitter reflections, which the presence of a Victor, made terrible by our destruction, naturally forces upon the mind. But now the sight of it thus changed would call up a mixture of pleasing and painful sensations. It would now at the same time oppress and revive. It would associate the ideas of their sufferings and of their expectations, which ought always to present themselves together, to exclude on one hand despair, on the other, presumption. While it was a memorial of their guilt and shame, it would now also be an evidence of their hopes; still allaying the grief it occasioned by bringing home a balsam from the comforts, however remote, which the prophecy afforded.

The impropriety or injustice, as some call it, of punishing a mere instrument has been often objected. But when we place the fact in such a direction as that it may point to its true center, the Redemption, we find that if any thing before seemed amiss, it was from its being observed in a wrong position. As when some small

figure thrown back into the remote light of some excellent piece of painting, is considered apart, it may be thought unmeaning deformity and daubing: but as soon as its relation to the group is taken in, we are no longer at a loss to discern its expression and significance.

The revelation was thus begun: but it was not yet strong enough to preserve itself without further assistance, as it rolled down through the immense tract of time it had to pass. Its banks stood in need of constant repairs, lest its stream should be either dissipated and lost in so long a course, or be stained by the inlet of impure and corrupted waters. And in pursuing its channel it will appear to have been all along guided by an unerring hand. A select people was appointed for its reception and conveyance. As this designation often engaged them in difficulties which it required a fortitude more than human to overcome, they were taken under the more immediate protection of Heaven. And we shall find that the succession of wonders wrought for their encouragement was every where peculiarly adapted to their circumstances and wants. Once, when corruption was very near becoming universal, and the few faithful that remained were in the utmost danger from the violence of its increase, the fountains of the great Deep were

broken up, and the windows of Heaven were opened, to sweep away the infection, and save them from the surrounding contagion; and they only were preserved from the deluge of water, who had bravely withstood the inundation of vice.

When Abraham was to undergo the severest trials of his constancy from a persuasion that the blessing promised to all nations should spring from his seed, that seed was ^a raised up to him by one miracle, and ^b preserved by another.

God's government of the Jews is a scene of such great and stupendous wonders as cannot be beheld without deep and awful astonishment. They are to be fortified against the prevailing opinion of local and national Deities, and all the other errors and corruptions of idolatry. Accordingly God demonstrates himself to be the Lord by most tremendous proofs. He shews his sovereign power by turns over all the elements; commanding the service of the clouds and all the meteors of the air; restraining the impetuosity of the deep, and making the waters forget their fluid nature; opening the womb of the earth, and causing it to yield its increase without culture: He conducts his People with a mighty hand, and outstretched arm, sustains them with the

^a Gen. 17. 18. 21. ^b Gen. 22.

bread of Heaven, fights their battles, defeats the most formidable combinations against them, and to complete all, displays before them the insupportable splendor of his presence.

But the Saviour of mankind, the prince of peace approaches, and see what a pleasing aspect omnipotence now puts on ! His miracles breath the spirit of his laws ; they are all the off-spring of benevolence, of humanity, of that heaven-born charity which himself first planted on earth. He goes about doing good, dispensing blessings wherever he goes, giving sight to the blind, raising the lame from his couch, asswaging the troubles and disorders of the soul, healing all manner of infirmities, drying up the tears of the afflicted, and, where his relief is not accepted, himself weeping over the miseries and insensibility of mankind.

Lastly, for the conveyance of these glad tidings over the earth, we see ignorant and un instructed men inspired with heavenly wisdom ; the simple and artless are enabled to confound the wisdom of the wise, the unlearned become masters of persuasion, the gift of tongues naturalizes them in all countries, and impowers them to execute the commission they received^a, "Go ye, and teach all nations." Thus^b went they forth

^a Mat. 28. 19.

^b Mark 16. 20.

and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by signs following.

If we should now try what effect it would have to suppose the order of the miracles in any manner changed, this would be a farther illustration of the advantages resulting from their present situation. Which of all the miracles exhibited to the Israelites could have been to Adam, what the debasing of the serpent to the abject state of a reptile was, a standing security for the completion of his hopes, and a prelude to the final overthrow of his enemy?

To what end would the gift of languages have been bestowed upon the Israelites secluded as they were from the converse and society of all foreign people?

Or how would the power of overthrowing armies and extirpating nations have promoted the establishment of the Gospel of peace, or advanced the propagation of a religion, which was to level all distinctions, to reduce mankind again into one community, associating them in the soft ties of universal charity? Whatever changes we can fancy are only so many blemishes, and serve to prove that the farther we recede from the present disposition of the miracles, the farther we deviate into disorder and confusion.

SECTION IV.

————— *Alterius sic*
Altera poscit opem res, & conjurat
amicé. Hor.

IT appears then that there is a beautiful and regular series as well of miracles as of prophecies. It will be easy to advance one step farther, and to discern the mutual dependence between these. We have seen them introduced together, and we may observe them going on hand in hand, as if equally concerned in providing for the security of that religious faith, in support of which they at first appeared. As the first miracle came in to the assistance of the first prophecy, so we find their powers afterwards combined throughout the progress of the revelation; sometimes working alternately, and sometimes exerting their joint energy. The virtue of prophecy and doing miracles were generally communicated, and very often exerted, together; that the operations of the one might add credit and authority to the dictates of the other. The light of prophecies, and the strength of miracles were measured out in due proportions, and the remote com-

comforts of the former were seldom left long unsustained by the present and sensible convictions of the latter.

It is another strong circumstance of connection between them, that the miracles are in many cases proofs of the prophecies; as whenever the prophecy receives its accomplishment in some miraculous event. Now here the relation between them constitutes the whole strength of the prophecy, and makes the miracle appear doubly miraculous; and therefore in this case a separation would be doing the greatest violence to both, it would greatly disfigure the one, and wholly enervate the other.

But there is a general tie of affinity between them, and that is, their unity of design. They are common evidences of the same truth, and therefore have a right to a common consideration, for the same reason that every equitable court will decide upon a sum of the evidence. It would be a proceeding equally erroneous, in one case, to confine our attention to single miracles or prophecies, and in the other, to direct a Jury to withdraw and prepare a separate verdict on the testimony of every single witness, where the fact was attested by a number of concurring witnesses. In a series of consistent evidence, the force of any particular attestation does
not

not depend on its own clearness alone ; it borrows credibility from its agreement with the rest. All the prophecies and miracles, howsoever remote, are by their unity of design drawn together and formed into one regular Whole, growing stronger, and being mutually supported by the association. As the strength of the parts in a well constructed arch is the result, not of their own solidity alone, but of their uniform direction to one common center.

Thus we see out of what materials this great proof is made, and how those materials are put together. That G O D, with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years, could have finished the Redemption, as well as the Creation, in a moment. But in one case he adapted his operations to the understanding, in the other to the necessities, of his creatures. He could have brought together all the grand apparatus of this mystery, overwhelming one age with the lustre and astonishment which such an assemblage of prodigies must create. But by the regular distribution of them which his wisdom has made, what an ample provision arises for the necessities of all ! The faith of the old world is animated and enlivened by the encouragement of repeated promises, and constant accessions to their hopes ; and we feel
our

our own strengthned by the demonstrations of wisdom and goodness which break in upon us, while we contemplate a scheme thus unfolded and thus supported, and while we perceive the greater weight of testimony which these promises yield by being placed so remote from us, the evidence of prophecies still increasing with their distance from the predicted events. Had the Sun been for ever fixed, as it was once for some time, over Gibeon, that particular place would have been scorched with its heat, and dazzled with its lustre, whilst all other regions would have remained dark, cold, and comfortless: If we had then believed his station to have been appointed him by the supreme power, we must have believed that power to be regardless of us, or incensed against us. But now when we see him duly performing his revolutions, and successively warming and illuminating every part of the globe; we are convinced that his course must have been prescribed him by the universal Lord, and the common parent of all.

SECTION V.

Tantum series juncturaque pollet. Hor.

WE have seen this system of miracles and prophecies as it gradually grew up, guarding the religion and supporting the faith of antiquity. We are now at liberty to take a view of it when brought to perfection, and to consider with what peculiar advantage it gives evidence to ours.

Let us suppose it then for a moment not to have existed; that, by conceiving how its loss would have affected us, we may afterwards have the truer relish for its enjoyment. Let us suppose that our Saviour had only performed some one miracle; or, without his doing any thing miraculous, that his coming had been foretold barely by a single prophecy, describing some peculiarity in his life or conduct; and yet that, on the testimony of this evidence, he had required of us the same obedience to his laws, the same firm belief of the doctrines and mysteries of his religion, that he now does. In either case might we not with some shew of reason have complained that we had a very narrow basis to build our
faith

faith upon? Would it not have been with some plausibility objected, that the co-incidence of the prophecy with its event might possibly be accidental: that the miracle might be falsely imposed upon the world either by the actors or the relaters: that the beholders might be credulous, the performer an artful jugler, the historian weak or dishonest: or lastly that, it might possibly have been produced by a confederacy of all these. What could have fortify'd the heart even of the sincere and willing convert against all impression from these objections when backed by all the strength of reasoning, insinuated by all the subtilties of sophistry, set off with all the pleasing imagery of wit, opposed by stubborn and inveterate prejudices, and favoured perhaps by the propensity of inclination?

Here, if we call in again the universal proof to our aid, we shall with ease be enabled to defeat all these objections, when thus armed (to adopt the Apostles expression) in this Panoplia of God. And first observe what accession of strength will now be made to the credit of the historians. For here will be now a number of historians mutually supporting each other: historians of different ages, different countries, different complexions, abilities, educations, persuasions, interests: different in all other parts of their character,

ter; yet as historians perfectly consistent. Now what one motive can possibly be thought of, if we set aside the conviction of truth, that might have this uniform influence on writers so various? It could not be any ingredient in their constitution; for here are the sanguine and the phlegmatic, the active and the contemplative, the warm and the sedate, some who enjoyed all the fire of imagination, and others who possessed all the coolness of judgment. It could not be any similarity of education, any prepossession of sentiments, or adherence to favourite principles, nor lastly any union of interests: for here were the ignorant and the learned, those of simple unadorned minds, and those who had been enriched and refined with all the advantages of culture and instruction: some trained up in all the affluence and splendor of a court, some who hardly aspired above the humility of a cottage: here were the successful and the unfortunate, the martial and the timorous, the monarch and the mechanic: in short here were men engaged in the most discordant scenes of life. Now, when we see a plan so far beyond the compass of human genius to comprehend as that we have been reviewing, described by the joint assistance of men in every circumstance so distinguished, and this executed with the same consistency and uniformity

formity as if it had been the regular work of some great and single genius; what can we conclude, but that the Spirit of divine wisdom presided over the whole work, assigning each his part, and so conducting him through it, that this universal harmony might still be preserved?

The actors and the witnesses may properly be considered together: for to say that the one were credulous and deluded, supposes the other to be deceivers and impostors. But can any one look on this collection of wonders and yet retain the least suspicion of either? Can we behold them publicly exhibited in all ages and countries, before promiscuous multitudes of all ranks and distinctions, and can we think that all this may yet be resolved into artifice and deception, by imagining in all these instances, a very lucky concurrence of boldness and subtilty on the one hand, with a proper quantity of credulity and infatuation on the other? He who can entertain the suspicion must himself possess a very uncommon share of the weakness in question.

Had there been only one prophecy, and that at no great distance from its event, it might possibly be doubted whether it ought to be derived any farther than from human sagacity favoured by chance. As you remove the prophecy farther back, and again as you add to the number of prophe-

prophecies, the doubt gradually loses of its probability and dies away. But, where there is a chain of prophecies, set at all distances from their events, delivered by different persons, and yet dependent amongst themselves; you are then at liberty to make human discernment as deep-fighted, and chance as propitious as you please : though these principles should be sufficient as far as they go, yet they are absolutely too narrow to raise the least doubt upon : for you have now to account, not only for the coincidence of the prophecy and its event, but further for that surprising correspondence amongst the inspired of all ages, men under such different circumstances and in all other respects so dissimilar, which could impress upon their several prophecies an uniform tendency, and connect them together in a well concerted series.

Such is the complicated labour of the atheist when he should strike out a system without the help of an intelligence. For though we should allow his atoms to form themselves into a sufficient number of beautiful globes, yet he could never on his principles tell us, whence the harmony of their revolutions, and whence the secret power that could incline bodies so remote from each other to this unanimous motion round one common center,

Our

Our reasoning with regard to miracles will be exactly parallel to this. For if we take only one miracle, it might be thought by some a well managed cheat, imposed upon a credulous multitude contributing to their own delusion. As the miracles are repeated the probability of delusion will diminish, and when they are sufficiently multiplied must at length be intirely destroyed. But when there is a series of miracles, performed by different persons, at times very remote from each other, and yet all concurring in support of the same design; you may then assume what quantity of craft and credulity you will ask: for the most extravagant measures of the one, and all possible contrivance of the other, and these put together in a manner the most convenient for the purpose, could never carry an imposture beyond the production of so many separate miracles; they could never enable you to account for this wonderful consent and harmony amongst unconnected and independent facts; facts so distant from each other in time and place, that no human means of communication could be opened between them. When we see the miracles of our Saviour and his disciples, of the prophets, of Moses, and those exhibited to Abraham, all conspiring to give testimony to the same truth; can we ascribe this union amongst them to any

other but HIM, who existed through all these periods, and who could with truth utter this paradox "Before Abraham was, I am."

But we have not yet seen our proof in its full strength. If the series of prophecies alone was far above the effects of all human wisdom, and that of miracles so superior to the efforts of human power; how invincible must be the force of these when united! What combination of mortal, nay let us add infernal, subtilty and strength can be able to weaken a chain of evidence, where such admirable wisdom and such astonishing acts of power are knit together, and miracles and prophecies beautifully interwoven with each other. If we should grant that artifice, penetration, and authority, in league against weakness, ignorance, and inexperience, might be able to produce a very small part, a link or two, of such a chain; yet, as this extends, the suspicion of deceit must still contract, and the proof grow more perfect; and when it runs through all ages, since it then infinitely out-measures the reach of all human capacity, the suspicion must intirely vanish and the proof become compleat. So vast a design could be produced by no confederacy, except where HE presided, who is alone "Great in counsel, and mighty in work."

SECTION VI.

Ἡ πῶς αὖ ἄλλως συνέστη τοῦτο παν, εἰ μὴ ρυθμῶ
πῶς καὶ ταῦτα διεκεκοσμητο; Dion. Longin.

*I have even from the beginning declared
it to thee; before it came to pass, I
shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say,
mine idol hath done them, and my
graven image, and my molten image
hath commanded them. Isaiah.*

VISIBLE representations are a considerable relief to the mind in her researches after truth. They sustain her wing through the regions of thought; and she becomes less sensible of the fatigue of abstracting while she has these to repose on. The sight of a figure has in an instant cleared up all difficulties, where demonstration could not succeed. It may not therefore be disagreeable to some to see a compendious delineation of the scheme we have been considering.

It commences then with the aera of the world's creation. For we cannot suppose it to

have been long after that, that the Revelation was opened by a ^a prophecy, and confirmed by a miracle both exhibited to our first parents, the only two of the human race then existing.

It was confirmed in the year 1556 by an establishment of Gods covenant with Noah and by a ^b prediction delivered to him, which was accomplished about one Hundred years afterwards in that stupendous miracle the universal deluge; when Noah and his family alone were spared from the general destruction, that through them the original revelation might be conveyed in its purity to the new world.

It was farther enlarged and supported in the years 2083, 2106, 2132 by a ^c prophecy thrice repeated, and the last time accompanied by a miracle, both given to Abraham, a Chaldean, a man of a most unblameable and exemplary life, whose confidence in this promise was so great, that he sacrificed to it the chief advantages and endearments of life, abandoning his patrimony, his friends, and his country in compliance with its call.

By a ^d prophecy in the year 2315 delivered by Jacob on his death-bed, whose life had been led

^a Gen. 3. ^b Gen. 6. 17. ^c Gen. 12. 18, 22 Chapters.
^d Gen. 49.

in pastoral innocence, and whose virtue had undergone the severest trials.

By several very astonishing ^a miracles about the year 2514 performed by Moses, a man of a royal education, of distinguished learning and virtue, in the presence of the Egyptians, a sagacious and skilful people, and determined enemies to the cause which Moses had undertaken.

By several great ^b miracles during the 40 subsequent years performed by the same Moses in the presence of the Israelites, who submitted to his conduct with great reluctance and discontent.

By a ^c prophecy delivered by Balaam, a Mesopotamian, in the year 2552, to Balak king of Moab. Balaam seems to have been a man of little true piety, and to have been compelled rather than led by his inclinations to the service of religion. However in this particular instance, he delivered with a becoming freedom the part of the revelation communicated to him, though he saw that he must forfeit by it, riches, honours, and the favour of a Monarch.

By a ^d prophecy delivered by Moses in the year 2553. To this period is the history of revelation continued by Moses.

^a Exod. as far as 15 Chapter.
tateuch. ^c Numb. 24. 17.

^b The remainder of the Pentateuch.
^d Deut. 18. 18.

By a ^a prophecy delivered by Nathan to king David in the year 2962 and supposed to be recorded by Nathan.

By a ^b prophecy of uncertain date delivered and recorded by David, a man whose heroic virtues raised him from a low condition to a throne.

By a ^c prophecy of the prophet Joel in the year 3204.

By a ^d prophecy of Amos a shepherd in the year 3217.

By several very remarkable ^e prophecies interspersed with miracles, for the space of 60 years from the year 3240, delivered by Isaiah, a person of noble birth and a sublime writer : who for the variety, extent, and clearness of his prophecies is distinguished by the title of the Evangelical Prophet ; and who suffered great distresses, and, as tradition says, death itself from his countrymen, irritated against him by his faithful discharge of the prophetical function.

By a ^f prophecy of Hosea in the year 3279.

By a ^g prophecy of Micah in the year 3294.

By several ^h prophecies continued for upwards of forty years from the year 3375 by Jeremiah, a Priest selected to the prophetical office very

a 2 Sam. 7. b Pf. 16. 10, 11. c Joel 2. 28, 29. d Amos 9. 11. e Isaiah's Prophecy. f Hosea 13. 14. g Micah 4. 5 Chapters. h Jeremiah's prophecy.

young : who after a share in the national calamities he had foretold, and bearing with exemplary fortitude the persecution of the Jews, whose resentment he had drawn upon himself by the reproofs and denunciations he honestly set before them, is said to have been stoned to death by them at Tahpanhes in Egypt.

By a * prophecy in the year 3417 delivered to the Jews in their captivity at Babylon by their fellow-captive Ezekiel, who also, like his contemporary Jeremiah, was of the priestly family.

By several prophecies attended with miracles for the space of 69 years from the year 3401 delivered partly to the captive Jews, and partly to the Babylonians, a people famed for science, by Daniel, who was descended of the royal family of the Kings of Judah, and carried captive to a foreign court in his youth. He was there educated in all the learning of the Chaldeans. His distinguished piety and wisdom, which Nebuchadnezzar justly esteemed more than human, raised him to a station of the highest trust and dignity under that monarch. He foretold and survived the conquest of Babylon by the Persians, and the return of the Jews to their country; and his merits continued him in the favour of the two Persian monarchs Darius and Cyrus: he was,

* Ezekiel 37.

as Josephus observes, the only prophet that enjoyed a great share of worldly prosperity.

By a ^a prophecy in the year 3484 delivered to the Jews after their return from the Babylonish captivity by Haggai.

By ^b three prophecies of Zechariah in the year 3485.

By several ^c prophecies in the year 3607 by Malachi who closed the succession of prophets under the Mosaic dispensation. All these are recorded by the prophets themselves.

It was accomplished in the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Saviour, which was one continued scene of miraculous goodness and power for the space of 33 years from the year 4004. These events are recorded by eye-witnesses, plain, disinterested, and artless men, who by laying down their lives gave the greatest proof of honesty that men can give.

It was attested to the world by miracles too many to be enumerated, exhibited before the most inquisitive and learned of mankind, nay before all the nations of the known world, by the disciples of our Lord, men of tried virtue, but destitute of all the helps of human knowledge or power; and lastly by Paul of Tarsus, a man of

^a Haggai 2. ^b Zech. C. 3. 8. C. 9. 9, 10. C. 11. 14. Malachi 3. 4 Chapters.

penetration, learning and eloquence, who from a persecutor became by a miracle a convert to the christian cause.

Such are the bounds of revelation as marked out to us in the sacred writings. And could human contrivance give rise, or human power success, to a scheme of these dimensions? Mark its increase and extent, how steadily it advances, how it breaks through all interruptions, and overbears all resistance, how regular its progress, how deep laid its foundations, how awful its magnitude: and then ask if such be the result of human foresight, and human abilities; ask if that subtilty, whose most contiguous designs are very superficial and uncertain, could work at such a distance so deeply and so surely; if that power, which finds itself counteracted and circumscribed by every being with which it is surrounded, could give birth to such amazing operations; ask in short if *threescore years and ten* could expand itself, till it became commensurate with four thousand years.

Let us consider this a little more circumstantially. Can such a scheme be merely an invention of the historians concerned in recording it? No; there is an uniformity runs through it, which will never suffer us to think it the casual production of a number of men so remote in their ages,
divided

divided in their interests, and distinguished in their geniuses. For did these men, utter strangers to any general design, each of them direct his fortuitous labours on his own detached part so exactly according to rule and measure, that out of all these parts accidentally put together there arose, as out of a chaos, one harmonious and well-proportioned whole? No reasonable inquirer can acquiesce in so absurd a solution; because it supposes chance to be the parent of final causes, and to act, under different circumstances, with a view to one determinate end.

The opinion that the Iliad of Homer was composed out of a set of scattered rapsodies, which the poet left behind him, hath been justly exploded; because there never was a poem where the unities are better preserved. But what an affront to all common sense would the judicious critic have esteemed it, had it been added, that every one of these rapsodies was conceived by a different imagination?

But if devious fancy is insufficient for the purpose, and intention must be allowed necessary to such a production; shall we say then, that each of the historians copied his part after some pre-conceived Model? If there was such a Model it must have been designed by Moses, who executed the first part of the history. Allow that the design

sign was finished in the most masterly manner, how was it communicated to the succeeding historians, and concealed at the same time from all the rest of mankind who were to be deceived by it? How was it contrived that, after lying buried at intervals for so long a space of time, it should come to be revived precisely at those critical periods when it was to be resumed, and discovered to those geniuses alone who were best qualified to carry it on? But were it possible to think of some contrivance, by which it might be conveyed down from century to century, and made all the way to sink and emerge in a convenient manner; still it would be asked, what inducement could be annexed to it to engage the historians to undertake their assigned parts? If it was to bribe them with affluence, ease, and grandeur, we will suppose David or Daniel to have been overcome by such temptations; but what power could they have over the majority, who neither enjoyed nor wished to enjoy such advantages? Say that it was impowered by some allurements or other, no matter what, to influence and give a proper turn to their minds; but how could it actuate minds so differently turned, as their productions shew them to have been? how could it put in motion the sublime conceptions of the Psalmist, the enraptured fancy of Isaiah, the pathetic soul of the Priest

priest of Anathoth, and the tranquil minds of the Evangelists? In short, there can be no motive thought of that could bias such a variety of dispositions to a concurrence in a deceit; and therefore it must be concluded, that the historians have described to us what appeared to them at least to be real occurrences, and actual events.

Perhaps then the honest historians were themselves imposed upon amongst the rest of mankind, by the subtilty of those who were employed in the management of this pretended revelation. Now we might insist, that since the historians were all of them also engaged in the action, it was impossible for them to be impostors in the capacity of performers, while they are presumed honest as historians. But let us overlook this advantage which the consideration of them as historians has given us, and set them before us in the single light of actors. Here again, if they are said to be impostors, the same set of unanswerable difficulties will recur, only much corroborated by this circumstance, that the series of actors is much longer than that of historians, and their characters more various. If then they carried their views no farther than that every one might gain success barely to his own private part of the imposture, how was it possible that so great a number of alien and random inventions, when

when they were by accident applied to each other, should not only keep clear of all repugnancy and collision, but should fall at once into a most beautiful arrangement, and bring with them all the marks of relation, previous design, and mutual dependency?

But if they also acted in concert, their plan must have been contrived by Adam, since he first made way for it by abusing his posterity with the notion of a fall, and the pretended expediency of a redemption. The difficulty therefore is much increased, since it is now to be conveyed some thousand years farther than when it was supposed to come originally from Moses; and precautions are to be taken, that, as it passes down through ages of darkness and ages of science, it may be covered all the while from the deluded, and unveiled only to the agents in its propagation. But were it possible to think of some secret means of communication between the extreme ages of the world, some hidden channel by which a general scheme might have been conveyed, unsuspected by the rest of mankind, from impostor to impostor, from Adam to the Apostles; yet what, shall we say, induced them to engage in the attempt, or by what lucky contingency or wise pre-ordination did a set of men duly qualified arise at fit intervals, and take their stations

stations for the execution of it? Shall we suppose them to have been seduced by any of those three temptations which draw the bulk of mankind after them, riches, honours, or pleasures?

Avarice might perhaps find its account in the numerous flocks and herds of the patriarchs, or in the affluence of a land flowing with milk and honey: but it could never be avarice which consented to resign all its possessions for generous and charitable uses, to sell its lands for the support of the poor.

The intrepid lawgiver of the Israelites, or the aspiring son of Jesse, might have been fired by Ambition: but it could not be ambition which exposed the prophet Balaam to this angry rebuke from the king of Moab, "I thought to promote thee to great honour, but, lo! the Lord hath kept thee back from honour." It could not be ambition which encouraged the prophets so constantly to thwart the inclinations of the great: It could not be ambition which taught humility to the disciples of a crucified master.

Pleasures might find their way into the splendid court of David: but it could not be in pursuit of pleasures that the forerunner of our Lord retired into the wilderness, and came preaching and practising the austere duties of penitence and self-denial: It could not be a love of pleasure

ture which formed so many heroes in suffering, which furnished the glorious catalogue of those who were *destitute, afflicted, tormented*. Indeed the shining piety of most of those who acted in the service of revelation, is alone sufficient to convince us, that they must have been proof against every indirect motive.

Yet there are some who have thought of a motive which, they say, this very piety would rather expose them to, than secure them against. For might not a spirit of enthusiasm, after they were deluded by it themselves, be the innocent occasion of their attempting to draw others into the same delusion? You may think you discern one of the ^a symptoms of enthusiasm in the glowing imagination of the Evangelical Prophet, or the fervent zeal of St. Paul; but how was the meekness of Moses, how were the calm dispassionate minds of our Lord's attendants, kindled into a flame? If the deep complainings, the mournful strains, so frequently occurring in the prophets, indicate a melancholy turn of mind; it could not be melancholy which inspired their songs of exultation and triumph; it could not be melan-

^a These are, says an admirable writer, the ingredients of which enthusiasm is generally composed; great heat of temper, melancholy, ignorance, credulity, and vanity or self conceit. *Observations on the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul.*

choly which tuned the joyful harp of David. Should the illiterate disciples be thought to lie open to the charge of ignorance and credulity ; yet surely the learned scholar of Gamaliel, and implacable persecutor of christianity, will not be suspected of either. Where modesty and humility are every where so remarkable, there can be no colour of reason for the imputation of vanity. But, could it be rendred in any degree probable, that the religious phrenzy had possessed such a variety of characters, and that the whole succession of prophets had unfortunately caught the contagion from each other ; yet would it be utterly inconsistent with the nature of enthusiasm, to conceive a number of unhappy men under its influence acting consistently with themselves and with each other ; to imagine a System, which reason cannot improve, could be engendred by madness, and perfect harmony maintained amongst the extravagancies, the ravings, the unnatural formations of a delirious fancy.

But if neither the honesty of their intentions, nor the soundness of their understandings could be defended to our satisfaction, it would still be impossible to account for the success of such an imposture. For will you say that it was imposed by authority and established by power ? Noah the father of the new world, and Abraham the
father

father of that family to which the revelation was long confined, had authority : the victorious leader of the Israelites, and the chief favourite of the Babylonish monarch, had power : but what power could the unfriended prophets pretend to, or the persecuted disciples of him, *who had not where to lay his head?* Was it by superior learning, subtilty of genius, and a deep knowledge of the powers of nature, that they were enabled to delude the world? *Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds :* Daniel was master of all the secrets of the chaldean Magi : Paul of Tarsus is ranked amongst the most renowned Orators, and is named with Isocrates, Demosthenes, and Xenophon : But what art, what force of genius, had the plain shepherd Amos, or the unlettered fishermen of Galilee ?

Perhaps then you will choose to shift the supposition ; and to say, that the imposture might have been established without the assistance of great abilities ; that it might have been so silently conducted, as to have escaped the notice of those, who were concerned to detect it ; or that the witnesses, if there were any, might have entertained it upon very slender proofs, being ignorant, credulous, or prejudiced in its favour.

D

That

That it was not transacted in obscurity, they who floated in the ark over a drowned world, and in them all their posterity, had a proof never to be forgot. That the miracles of Moses were not done in retirement, witness a whole land groaning under plagues inflicted at his command, witness her desolated fields, her darkened atmosphere, her expiring sons. That the miracles of our Saviour and his apostles did not shun the light, a fainting multitude sustained by food created under the test of their astonished senses, the sick publicly restored to health, the dead publicly raised to life, the utmost bounds of the Roman empire, and promiscuous thousands collected out of every nation under heaven, Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, will bear witness.

That they could be through ignorance imposed upon, the boasted wisdom of the Egyptians, the recondite learning of the Magi, the scrupulous philosophy of Athens, and the polite arts carried with the Roman arms into most parts of the known world, will not suffer us to suspect.

If

If you think they might be through prejudice willingly deceived, call to mind the hard bondage of the chosen people in Egypt, and Pharaoh's hostile pursuit of their hosts; call to mind their murmuring and mutinous behaviour to Moses in the desert; call to mind the persecuted Prophets: That the Gentiles did not receive Christianity with the readiness of prepossession, let the blood of the Martyrs write in indeleble characters: That the Jewish nation was not bigotted in favour of our Lord, let the horror of that shout, "Crucify him, crucify him," proclaim to all the world.

To comprehend all at once. Could we suppose all possible advantages of power and genius on one side, opposed to all the disadvantages of impotence and ignorance on the other; yet even thus, where all the fit engines of imposture work under a covert so favourable to delusion, they could not establish such an imposture as this. Let all human abilities be accumulated in the actors, and the witnesses loaded with all human weaknesses and defects; let a vein of craft and a vein of credulity run parallel to each other through the antediluvian, the patriarchal, the mosaic, the prophetic, and apostolical ages; yet still the harmony, that appears throughout the plan of revelation, is of such a nature, as

makes it absolutely impossible to be the product of humanity thus luckily circumstanced. For except the aggregate of human power could rise at last to omnipotence, and the sum of human knowledge could amount to prescience, they could never have done more than to take all advantages of present occurrences; they could never have contrived nor conducted a scheme, whose success depended on events situated in remotest futurity; which was so surprisingly accommodated to every change of circumstances that should arise through succeeding times; in whose beginning might be seen, as it were, the rudiments and seeds of its perfection; and whose accomplishment was a wonderful realizing of events imaged in its state of immaturity. Such a scheme could have been carried into execution by none but HIM, “^a who declares the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” It could be planned by no wisdom but that, “^b which reacheth from one end to the other mightily; and doth sweetly order all things.” The Draught above given of Revelation is indeed rude and unfinished. It is drawn in imitation of those, who represent the solar system by

^a Isaiah 46. 10.

^b Wisdom 8. 1.

the revolutions of little gilded balls, or who delineate the world on small tablets. We have only touched upon some of its principal points, laying it down, as it were, by a very contracted scale. However it is not without its uses, if it has at all assisted or strengthened our conceptions in the course of our reasoning; or if this imperfect discovery of the beauties of revelation may engage any one in a serious study of the sacred volumes themselves, through a desire to enjoy a fuller and more accurate view of them *.

* The reader will perceive, that the dates in the foregoing section are taken from the common scheme of Chronology, used in the margin of our Bibles. But the argument will have the same force, on any other hypothesis of note among the learned; nor indeed will it be invalidated, even supposing all ancient Chronology to be as precarious, and as incapable of being adjusted, as some late *letters on the study and use of History* represent it to be: Unless it could be imagined (which surely the noble writer himself would not suggest) that all the supposed Predictions, Occurrences, and Narrations here refer'd to, were the product of the same age at least, if not the contrivance and fiction of one and the same man: To a more absurd imagination than which Infidelity need not be reduced.

SECTION VII.

Ταυτα μελετα, η τετοις ιαδι.

*Meditate upon these things; give thyself
wholly to them. 1 Tim. 4. 15.*

LET us now collect into a narrow compass the nature of our argument. We say first then, that the truth of christianity is attested by several miracles and prophecies. But, forasmuch as it might possibly be suspected of any single fact that it owed all its credit to some lucky accident, or to the misapprehensions of ignorant and credulous men misled by power and cunning; therefore in the next place, these several miracles and prophecies uniting all their forces, and forming a series of connected facts, every part of which communicates strength to every other part, we say that the evidence arising from this combination is so clear and strong, that every shadow of suspicion must vanish. For that power and wisdom which could preserve consistence through such a series of facts must not have been short-lived, transient, or interrupted, but must have
conti-

continued in action from the beginning to the end of the series: and, because towards the end is placed a great event, to which every preceeding part has a manifest relation, that wisdom must also from the very original have had a clear view and perfect assurance of its completion. But these are characters of wisdom and power applicable alone to the divine. For that wisdom which could guide a progression of facts through so immense a space of time with an uniform direction to one determinate end, could be no other than the wisdom which foresees all future events; and that power which could guard it through all interfering and opposing occurrences, turning aside every contrary force which might have weakened or destroyed its tendency to the destined end, could be no other than the power which gives motion to, and withdraws it from, every dependent being. In so effectual a manner does the general harmony running through the system of revelation, cover from all suspicion of deceit the particular miracles and prophecies of which it is composed.

If this be the right way of treating the evidence for our religion, the following observations will not seem to be impertinently introduced.

I. This consequence from the nature of the argument cannot escape us, that all the scriptures
are

are of the highest importance to us, there being no book contained in them which does not either contribute to the evidence or the explanation of the revelation : the first prophecy, like the grain of mustard-seed to which the gospel is compared, gradually growing up, enlarging and expanding itself in the subsequent scriptures ; till at last we behold it in its full magnitude, “ yielding its fruit “ for the healing of the Nations.”

2. Providence cooperating with natural causes, in determining the time of our Saviour's coming, would have a regard to that season when the circumstances and disposition of mankind were such as might make way for its speedy propagation and establishment. That the most extensive monarchy then subsisted, and that the minds of men, much improved by learning, were prepared for the reception of truth, may reasonably be esteemed circumstances of this kind : By the former of these a communication being opened between most of the nations of the known world, the progress of the gospel must have been greatly facilitated, and if by the latter it was subjected to all the rude handling of a sceptical examination, yet this helped to bring it forth into that full light where it was most for its advantage to appear. Besides these and several other considerations which might be added for the satisfaction

tisfaction of that inquiry, why the Messiah was not sent into the world to save mankind much earlier; and besides that the delay can be thought no loss to any age, since those who went before were saved by faith in the promise; we may add, that the gospel could not have been advanced much higher into antiquity without shortning the chain, and consequently, lessening the force of evidence.

3. We can with no reason complain of our being placed so remote from the ages of prophecies and miracles, because our evidence is so far from being less than theirs who were contemporary with the inspired, that it is actually superior. If they, who were coeval with the miracles or prophecies, had the evidence of their senses for the truth of some particular facts, this can hardly be thought to set them upon a level with us, who have the advantage of seeing the whole chain completed, and of deliberately examining its strength and connection through all its parts. As we may judge better of the skill and abilities of an architect, when we see a finished building, than when we see it incomplete.

4. To these observations respecting the past and present ages, we may naturally subjoin, that we have the greatest reason to confide in the due completion of all those passages of scripture which
still

still look forward into futurity, and firmly to believe, that *the mystery of God shall be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.* Revel. 10. 7.

5. To those forward critics, who talk with great petulance and boldness on the various parts of this system, without ever having considered the whole, may be applied what Aristotle elegantly remarks discoursing of the material system. “ One can hardly forbear pitying the littleness of mind of those authors, who have laboriously described to us the nature of some small place, the situation of a city, the course of a river, or the beauty of a mountain, some writing of Ossa, some of Nysa, some of the Corycean cave, or other parts of the world ; when we see them struck with ordinary things, and priding themselves in these narrow speculations. This arises from their never having

α Δικαι και τις μετα αυτους λεξιγραφουσι ημιν ενος τοτου φυσιν, η μιας χρημης πολιως, η ποταμου μεγαδου, η ουρας μεγαδου, οια τις ηδη επισημειωσι, φεζοντες, οι μιν, την Οσσαν· οι δε, την Νυσαν· οι δε το Κορυκαιον αυτον· οι δε, οταν ενχη των επι μακρης· ουκ εστιν αν τις της μικροφυχας, πε τοχνην εκπληγματος, και μεγα φρονιτης επι θιμελεχ μιμεχ. τυτο δε παχυσι, λεξ το εθιαται των κρητινων ενιαυ· λεγω δε, χρημην, και των εν χρημη μεγατων· εδεποτε γαρ αν, τυτους ζητησις επισημειωσι, εθωμμεζον π των αλλων, αλλα παντα αυτους πε αλλα μικρα κρημμενισιν αν, και εδενος εθια προς την τεττην υπερεχνη.
Arist. περι χρημην 1.

“ contem-

“contemplated higher things, I mean the universe, and the great bodies of the universe. If they were once brought to a near prospect of these, their wonder would be removed from every other object, and all other things would appear small, and scarce worthy of regard when compared with their superior excellence.” If these confined inquiries into natural philosophy merited this censure from Aristotle, even where they were undertaken for the discovery of beauties; what must have been his thoughts of those, whose only pursuit, in a much more important subject, is after defects and blemishes? who, if they can point out some single passage which in their superficial and rapid way of reasoning may be concluded unintelligible, think they have done enough to overturn revelation? and who would have mankind receive general impressions of so grand a subject, from any detached circumstance in the history of NOAH, JONAS, or St. PAUL, that may seem most capable of a ludicrous or unfavourable representation? We see plainly that Aristotle, far from allowing these to be the men of those liberal and enlarged conceptions, that uncommon compass of thought, they pretend to, would have given them no milder appellation than that of *μενοειδεις*, “men of little minds.”

6. The

6. The nature of the evidence does not require that every christian should be able to answer every objection he may hear on the subject of revelation. "It is obvious", as the judicious Bishop Butler remarks, "how much advantage the nature of this evidence gives to those persons who attack christianity, especially in conversation. For it is easy to shew in a short and lively manner, that such and such things are liable to objection, that this and another thing, is of little weight in itself; but impossible to shew, in like manner, the united force of the whole argument in one view." In the meantime, under these circumstances, let the plain and well meaning christian enjoy perfect composure of mind in this reflection. "These loose objections, minute cavils, indirect fallies of wit, unnatural distortions of ridicule, shall never give me the least disturbance. The evidence God has been pleased to give me for the truth of his revelation does not hang wavering by any slender circumstance, is not of a thin or shadowy substance: and therefore it would be unreasonable to suffer any scruples about a circumstance, which may arise wholly from misapprehension, from some casual violence offered it, or false lights thrown upon it, to shake

“ or unsettle my faith; whose evidence is a body
 “ of such dimensions, and casts so strong a light,
 “ that it is as visible to the plainest as acutest un-
 “ derstandings, and that no subtilties or refine-
 “ ments, nor even real obscurities, about detach-
 “ ed parts, can ever make me doubt of its exist-
 “ tence.”

7. We may now discern the constitutional and specific difference between the evidence of our religion, and that of all others. Every religion has pretended to some miraculous interpositions in its favour, neither have those wanted their converts. But then their predictions were ever ambiguous, and never far preceeded the event; their miracles were few in number, incoherent and weakly supported; greatly limited both in time and place, confined to some narrow corner of the world, and taking in some very inconsiderable part of duration: few had a share in the performance, and they underwent the inspection of few witnesses. We may still therefore continue to disbelieve the miracles which Livy relates, though he had reported them with all the confidence of one who was himself persuaded of their truth, and yet consistently give credit to the miracles of the Bible. For here only is a chain of evidence of admirable beauty and contexture, the work of no single hand, age, nor country, taking
 its

its rise far above the annals of other nations, preserved intire and unbroken through all the chafins of history, through all the interruptions of the greatest revolutions, and running along through an immense tract of duration, from the very confines of the creation till the fulness of time arrived.

Thus do all the miracles and prophecies together, every one bringing in its just contribution of beauty and strength, compose one complete, universal, and all-sufficient proof of the divinity of the christian religion. As when the command of the almighty Creator first separated the particles of light from the dark matter of the chaos, these, suspended in various quantities, and liable to be obscured or drunk up by every dark and watery cloud, gave a faint unsteady light. But when again Omnipotence associated their scattered beams, and collected them into one body, he placed it in the center, an exhaustless fountain of light, for ever to warm and illuminate the whole system.

SECTION VIII.

Πλαναθε, μη ειδotes τας γραφας, μηδε την δυναμιν
του Θεου.

*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor
the power of God. Mat. 22. 29.*

IT is a melancholy prospect to behold many amongst us still sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, after this glorious day-spring from on high hath visited us: to see men abuse that free access to the records of revelation which they should esteem their happiness; examining them without any higher relish than what some fancied defects may give, and contemplating the light they yield without any emotion of pleasure, till perhaps after gazing long on its splendor they imagine that they have discovered certain spots in it. For the strongest light still blinds the eye that looks with too much boldness upon it. I wish I knew how to prevail with such to suspend their enjoyment of these little imaginary blemishes, were it only till they could take one comprehensive and deliberate view of the evidence

dence which christianity offers them, and might thereby satisfy themselves whether the little parts which they now separately blame, do not make a more advantageous appearance when each possesses its natural place in the intire structure.

“ You must excuse us if we seem more than
 “ commonly warm and earnest in our solicitations
 “ to you. There is a motive animates our addresses, which those engaged on your side cannot
 “ possibly feel; I mean the strong one of compassion: Compassion to see you voluntarily deprived of all the benefits of Redemption, and
 “ cherishing the weaknesses of your nature instead of applying a remedy to them. Suffer
 “ me then to lead you up into an exceeding high
 “ mountain, from whence you may have a sight
 “ of revelation in its full extent and glory. And
 “ here let me exhort you to fall down and worship him, who from a like situation gave proof
 “ of his divinity by that noble repulse to the
 “ grand adversary of our race, *Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the*
 “ *Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*
 “ From this exalted station see how all the roughnesses and irregularities that displeased you below, now disappear. You will surely agree
 “ with me now, that yon deep fissure, and that
 “ rugged precipice, which singly you thought
 defor-

“deformities, have an admirable effect. What
 “a smoothness of beauty every thing wears, and
 “how noble a prospect does this variety of ob-
 “jects all together compose !”

“And would you yet, in gaining a general no-
 “tion of a scheme so extensive as revelation, have
 “our attention confined to some of its minu-
 “test and seemingly weakest parts ? Would you
 “then allow one disputing against the existence
 “of a God, to limit your observation to some na-
 “ked rock, or some cold bed of ice under the
 “Arctic pole ? No : You would bid him leave
 “these little conceptions, and dilate his mind to
 “comprehend the universe.”

“You cannot but discern, how hopeless an at-
 “tempt it is to practice against us the stratagem
 “of that brave Roman youth, who overcame a
 “superior force by dividing it. It is to no pur-
 “pose to set about the conquest of some part
 “of revelation. You see the connection running
 “through the whole is so strong, that it must
 “stand or fall in one body. Of how little im-
 “portance then are all disputes about the superio-
 “rity of one branch of revelation to another !
 “disputes just of the same nature with theirs,
 “who would have divided themselves into par-
 “ties, one saying I am of Paul, another I am
 “of Apollos. Amongst the true patrons, the

"true doctrines, and the true evidences of christianity, there are no rivalships, no separate interests. The strongest principles of mutual attraction alike unite and harmonize them all. Let beauty then invite you, if you have that exquisite relish for beauty, which you would be thought to have, when you speak with rapture of the native charms of virtue: Beauty indeed, not of that visionary and barren kind which you admire; but beauty the most beneficent, and introductory to the highest enjoyments. It was the boast of the Romans that they conquered the world in order to civilize it: Christianity can say more; this conquers in order to make it happy. But you disdain the mercenary motive. You will be virtuous, sublimely and completely virtuous, without stooping for assistance or reward. Alas! in the present circumstances of humanity this is the true *ambitiosa paupertas*, the burlesque dignity of beggarly nobility in rich rags. Real wants and infirmities are not thus to be shaken off. Your moral beauty and rectitude can no more of themselves enable reason to command the passions, than the Stoical apathy to extinguish them. There was a time when virtue had sole possession of our nature, and when such haughty sentiments might better have been
 "come

“come us. But, even then, the principles you
 “speak of were not judged sufficient to maintain
 “her in her empire, much less can they enable
 “her to recover it. We are fallen, indigent, and
 “sinful beings. If then you are subject to any
 “of the complaints of our common humanity;
 “if, while you breathe with a generous ardor for
 “liberty, you find yourselves unwilling slaves to
 “vice; if, while you are engaged in the noble
 “pursuit of truth, you perceive yourselves una-
 “voidably betrayed into error; while you are
 “aspiring after perfection, if you discover any in-
 “curable disorders and deformities in your na-
 “ture; surely you can no longer suppress the
 “wish, that some friendly and powerful divinity
 “might be sent down from heaven, a guide and
 “protector to weak and erring man. Alcibia-
 “des under these circumstances had recourse to
 “his Socrates, when he begged him in the most
 “pathetic manner to put virtue in his power and
 “to rescue him from vice. But behold a greater
 “than Socrates appears to prevent your wishes.
 “He comes to conduct you to liberty, perfection,
 “and happiness: he who is himself “the Way,
 “the Truth, and the Life.” If a desire of the

a Cum se Alcibiades adflicaret, lacrimansque Socrati supplex
 esset, ut sibi virtutem traderet turpitudinemque depelleret. Cic.
 Tusc. Disp. L. 3. 32.

“ blessings he offers can engage you in a serious,
 “ free and full examination of the merits of his
 “ religion ; then doubt not but he will prosper
 “ inquiries undertaken with such a disposition,
 “ and soon make you happy in a conviction, that
 “ THE EVIDENCE FOR THE TRUTH OF CHRIS-
 “ TIANITY IS AS SATISFACTORY AS ITS END
 “ IS DESIREABLE.”

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